

A Different Time

A propeller driven plane drones somewhere overhead far out of sight. Its low monotone humming envelops a warm, spring Sunday afternoon somewhere in the 1950s. I sit on my 24 inch, black, single-gear Schwinn bicycle, keeping my balance by holding onto the door handle of an old, blue, four-door 1947 Dodge.

My consciousness pauses at the moment, feeling vaguely sad for no discernible reason. The week's events ended with this gift of nothing to do: no homework, no television shows, no new housing developments to explore or classmates able to come out and play.

The dead-end street needs a new asphalt topping. Where I am balance on the side, the asphalt has broken up into small gravel-like stones with an isolated weed sprouting up here and there. It is still early spring, the lawns are just beginning to turn green and the tulips and dogwood buds remain closed, waiting for a few consecutive days of warm weather. The air smells fresh, warmed slightly by a gentle breeze.

The droning airplane fills the vacuum of silence on this street with modest middle-class houses in this small suburban town, whose claim to fame will not come until the end of the next decade. Of all the towns in America, this town will have the second highest number of persons per capita to die in Vietnam—all of them men, of course, and all of them guys I knew.